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Policy Eye

Highlights of week ending Friday 27 January 2017



(Welcome to Policy Eye, a weekly service from Policy Watch offering a regular round up of UK education headlines and stories from over the previous 7 days.)

The week summed up

The latest Industrial Strategy and school funding make the main news this week for the world of education and that's not to forget BETT which as we speak continues to buzz with activity and innovation.

But the big news of the week has been the launch of the latest Industrial Strategy, the third of four major developments promised by the government to kick off 2017 (we've already had two, one on the shared society and mental health, and one on the Brexit principles with one on housing due to follow.)

Described as 'a new vision' by the government, 'a landmark opportunity' by the CBI but 'a comfortable collection of platitudes' by one commentator, the Strategy comes in the shape of 130 pages, 61 pledges, 38 questions, 10 pillars, and four imperatives. Two of these imperatives, on improving our poor track record on productivity and tackling the long-standing weaknesses in our technical education system, are not new but the other two, on getting the economy and skill levels match fit for life beyond Brexit and making sure the spoils are part of better-balanced shared society, are.

It is arguably against these four imperatives that the Strategy will ultimately be judged but for the moment there's a lot in there to interest the world of education and skills, indeed it features in at least half of the ten pillars that make up the Strategy. Unfortunately, the Paper rather runs out of steam towards the end so details on closing skill gaps, supporting regional growth and lifelong learning, which all come later, hardly get off the flip chart but some of the earlier proposals are more interesting. These include: excellence centres in FE for English and maths; consideration of a UCAS style application platform for technical routes; the development of specialist Institutes as part of an enhanced technical system; support for the eight great technologies; the possible creation of another Skills Observatory and perhaps more contentiously, the creation of new Sector Deals. No timescale and little extra funding are added at this stage but more details are likely to follow once the consultation completes in mid April.

On to school funding, the subject this week of debate and inquiry in Westminster, a report from the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) and increasing political attention. The consultation on the new national 'fair' funding formula still has a couple of months to run but the numbers claiming they'll lose out continues to grow and pressures are building. These pressures according to the NAHT include the reduction in the Education Services Grant, the rising costs of pupil needs, and increases in pensions and insurance and that's before the prospect of having to pay into the apprenticeship levy. The government offered little to its critics either in Committee or the House but as the Chair of the Education Committee indicated, perhaps the government should look at building in better protections. It could start with the Budget in March.



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Top headlines this week

- 'School budgets near breaking point.' ([Monday](#))
- 'Cable warns of appalling record on skills.' ([Tuesday](#))
- 'Grammars may ask parents for money.' ([Wednesday](#))
- 'Government on track to hit 3m apprenticeships target.' ([Thursday](#))
- 'Treasury takes back £384m school funding.' ([Friday](#)).

People/organisations in the news this week

General Policy

- [Industrial Strategy](#). The government published a new Industrial Strategy as part of its Plan for Britain post Brexit with an emphasis on raising productivity and skill levels and building an economy that works for all
- [School funding](#). Labour used an Opposition debate to challenge the government over school funding arguing that it was not delivering on its promise to protect school budgets debate and highlighting cases of schools in crisis as a result
- [Imagine Nation](#). The Cultural Learning Alliance, representing the arts, dance and music, published a further call for action to protect the arts in schools highlighting the wide range of benefits they brought
- [STEM numbers](#). The Gatsby Foundation published its latest data on STEM trends in education pointing to a low take-up in apprenticeships, concerns about numbers at A' level and worries about the impact of Brexit on future STEM take-up in HE
- [Class pay gap](#). The Social Mobility Commission published a new report based on research by the LSE and UCL revealing in more detail for the first time the average pay gap, particularly in occupations like medicine, finance and IT, between those from different social backgrounds.

HE

- [Breakdown of uni entry](#). UCAS published further data on 2016 uni entry broken down for over 130 HE providers by sex, ethnic group and area background showing continuing challenges in terms of access for many disadvantaged and black students particularly among the more selective universities
- [The road ahead](#). Daniel Korski, former deputy head of the Number 10 Policy Unit, highlighted the importance of UK HE in an article in the Daily Telegraph but argued that to survive, it needed to change in three ways: adopt new technology; improve the teaching experience; be open to new providers
- [Generation debt](#). The Intergenerational Foundation published its latest paper on the adverse effects of student debt arguing that increased inflation, rises in monthly charges and tuition fees could leave some graduates with lengthy outstanding debts, though some disputed its analysis
- [Making an impact](#). Professor Chris Husbands, V.C of Sheffield Hallam, highlighted the importance of the relationship between a university and its communities of learners and businesses as part of university impact week.



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FE/Skills

- [IfA shaping up](#). The government published further details for consultation on how the Institute for Apprenticeships is intended to operate from this April along with a list of initial board members
- [Learner participation](#). Latest government stats for the first quarter of 2016/17 showed apprenticeship starts slightly up but adult participation generally down
- [Levy explainer](#). The government updated its guidance for employers on how apprenticeship funding is intended to operate from 1 May 2017 onwards
- [DAS ready](#). FE Week reported that after a thorough check-up, the Digital Apprenticeship Service should be open for registrations in a few weeks
- [Incentives for apprenticeship](#). The OECD examined the question of how best to incentivize apprenticeship take-up in its latest Working Paper suggesting that financial incentives tend to have only a modest effect and that broader cultural change on training often has more beneficial results
- [7 Up](#). Frank Coffield, Emeritus professor at UCL's Institute of Education outlined seven ways in which Ofsted could work more with colleges to help them focus on improvement rather than jumping through inspection hoops.

Schools

- [Ad hoc numbers](#). The DfE published a range of data on post-16 maths participation for 2014/15 collated as part of the research for the forthcoming report on the subject by Professor Smith
- [Breaking point](#). The National Association of Head teachers (NAHT) published the results of its school funding survey indicating that the number of schools in deficit had doubled over the past year and calling on the government to recognize concerns in its forthcoming Spring Budget
- [Teacher shortages](#). The Migration Advisory Committee added three more subjects (Mandarin, computer science, general science) to the teacher shortage list but concluded there was no overall shortage of teachers
- [Teaching apprenticeships](#). The DfE confirmed that it was planning to introduce teaching and business manager apprenticeships in schools by 2018 as part of the pay back for having to pay the levy
- [Marks for markers](#). The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) along with awarding organizations and school leaders reported on the current state of play over exam markers and launched two new award schemes and a new website to help encourage more teachers to sign up as markers.

Tweet(s) of the week

- "The ladder of opportunity doesn't come to us pre-assembled, it is something that needs to be built" - [@halfon4harlowMP](#)
- "The things easy to teach are the things easy to robotize says [@SchleicherOECD](#)" [@merlinjohn](#)
- "David Widlake 'Cabinetofficeuk on flexible working: being seen in the office isn't the same as working" - [@CIPD_Events](#).



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Word or phrase(s) of the week

- Top education tweeting MPs. Over the last few weeks, the MP who has tweeted most about education matters is the Skills Minister Robert Halfon. He's followed closely by Shadow Education Secretary Angela Rayner with former Education Committee Chair, Barry Sheerman third in the top ten of education tweeting MPs. This information comes from political monitoring start-up PoliMonitor. For anyone who'd like to follow the instant reactions and initial thoughts of MPs on an issue like education, it's worth signing up to free alerts from PoliMonitor [here](#).
- Institutes of Technology. These were first announced in the Cameron government's Productivity Plan 18 months ago and have been given a new lease of life in this week's Industrial Strategy with the government promising some capital funding to help set them up. Some models already exist and the Dyson version is an obvious example but broadly they are intended to be specialist centres providing skills training at levels 3, 4 and 5, working closely with local employers to help meet identified skill needs. The government is promising further details later this year and an excellent summary of the whole concept can be found on Andy Westwood's blog [here](#).

Quote(s) of the week

- "Underpinning this strategy is a new approach to government, not just stepping back but stepping up" – the PM steps up to the plate on the new Industrial Strategy
- "It's a deeply cultural thing" – Sir Vince Cable explains why it's so difficult to secure parity of esteem for technical education
- "To avoid unnecessary staffing changes, schools should aim to plan their staffing over 3 -5 years" - the DfE still believes in long-term workforce planning in its latest guidance for schools
- "If education stopped being a posh word for babysitting, we'd value teachers more" Sir Tony (Baldrick) Robinson on the importance of the profession
- "This is the very definition of a zero-sum game" – head teachers express their concerns about grammar schools in a letter to the PM
- "When celebrities like Ed Balls leave Strictly, they all say that dance has changed their lives for the better" – Strictly's Darcey Bussell calls for dance to be more widely available on the school curriculum
- "What is needed is structural change which will help shape the schools system to be more efficient, innovative and professional in the drive for high education standards" – the Prime Minister's new education adviser rolls up his sleeves
- "All it does is drive a massive wedge between parents and children" Gary Lineker gives homework the red card.

Number(s) of the week

- 0.6%. Growth figures for the UK for the final quarter of 2016, slightly better than predicted and helping to contribute to an overall growth figure for the whole of last year of 2%, slightly lower than the 2.2% predicted but stronger than many had feared, according to the latest provisional figures
- £6,800. How much more on average someone from a more advantaged background gets paid a year than someone from a poorer background, according to stats from the Social Mobility Commission



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- 7%. The projected fall in the number of applications from EU students to UK universities this year according to figures quoted at the Education Committee hearing this week
- 44%. The number of HR professionals who are not convinced about the people management skills of their line managers according to the latest survey from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development
- 155,60. The number of apprenticeship starts in the first quarter of 2016/17 according to latest statistical figures
- £170m. The amount of money the government is putting forward to support the development of Institutes of Technology
- £1bn. The amount of non-staff spend that the government is looking for the schools sector to be saving by 2019/20
- 72%. The number of schools who reckoned their budgets would be unsustainable by 2019 according to the latest survey by the NAHT
- 34,000. The number of examiners, excluding moderators, needed each summer according to the latest report from the industry which suggests that more will be needed to cope with the shift back to more traditional exams
- 67%. The number of nursery schools liable to be struggling over funding according to research from an all-party parliamentary group
- £10.70. The average amount of weekly pocket money for boys aged 5-16, as against £8.50 for girls, according to research from Childwise.

What to look out for next week

- Head teachers' Roundtable Summit (Thursday)
- Lsect Winter Data Conference (Friday).